

HISTORY OF APPALACHIA, VIRGINIA

Presented at Appalachia Oktoberfest 10-6-18

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Big Stone Gap, Virginia 24219
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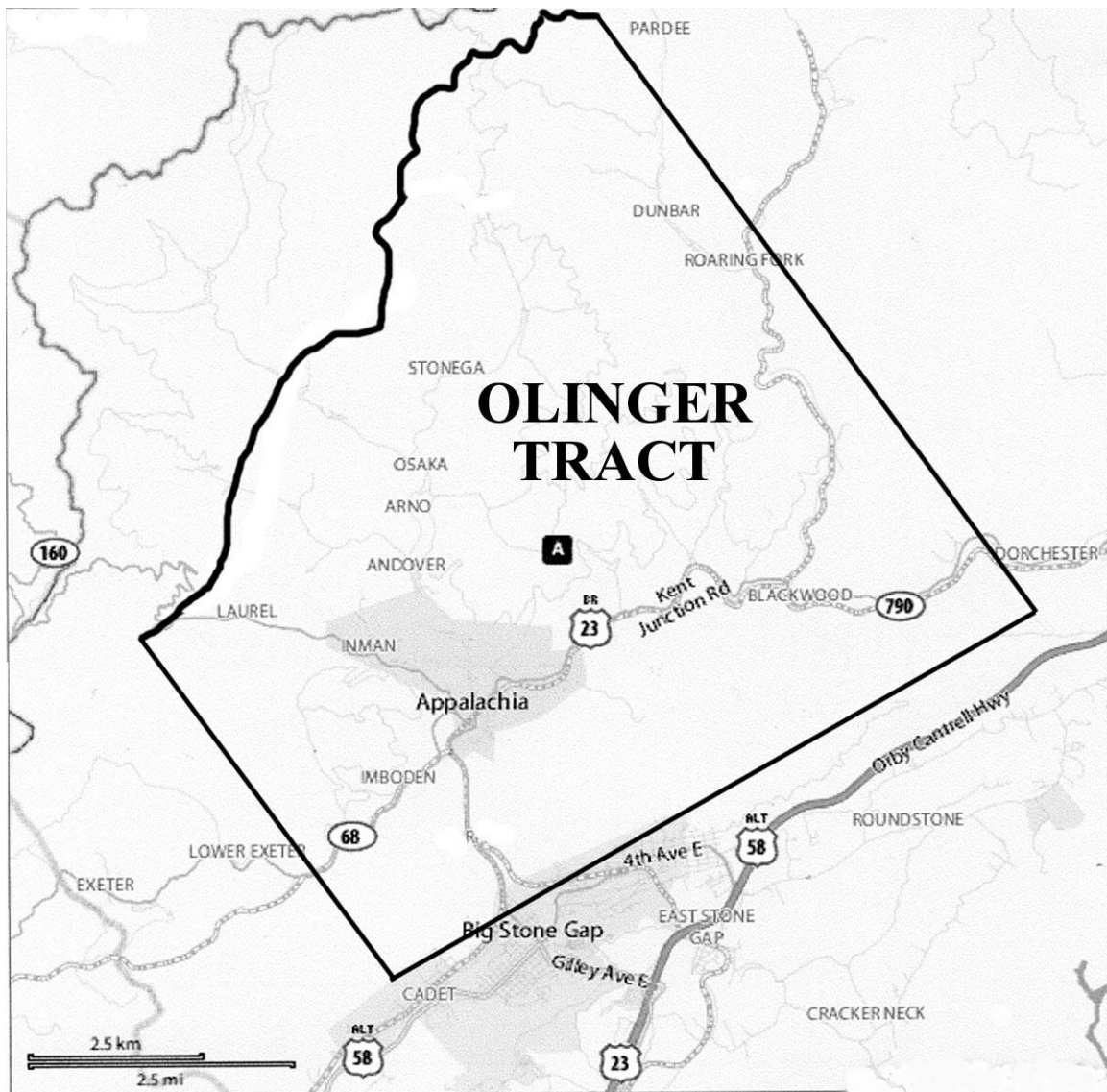
Graphic 1 – Spanish map of 1562 of the current southeast United States⁽¹⁾. It is the first graphic documentation of the Indian word that is the origin of the name of Appalachia, Virginia. In 1528 the Spanish explorer Pandildo de Narvaez⁽²⁾ discovered the Apalachee Indians, who lived on Apalachicola Bay, which is fed by the Apalachicola River, whose origins are in east central Georgia. The several journals of the 1539 de Sota Expedition record that they spent time at the Apalachee Indian's town at the mouth of the river of that name. This documentation should resolve any confusion over the correct pronunciation of the name of the town. The spelling is a Spanish phonic rendition of the Indian word. Spanish has no 'long' "A"

sound, as in the English word “able”. All the “A’s” in the word are pronounced as in “apple”.

The first record still in existence of any events or of any persons connected with the present Town of Appalachia are connected with the “long hunters”, who were professional deer skin hunters of the 1760’s and 1770’s. Several have left their names on the landscape of the area served by the Appalachia school system, such as James Baker of Baker’s Flats at the head of Roaring Fork, who at age 11 spent the winter of 1769-70 living under a rock ledge there. Others were John Benham, Edward Callahan, John and Andrew McHenry, James and John Looney, and George Gideon Ison.

In 1782 Chief Bob Benge had carried Fannie Scott into captivity in Ohio after he had killed her family at their home on Wallen’s Creek. They passed through the Gap in Stone Mountain and up present Callahan Creek to Stonega Gap. April 8, 1794 Benge was trying to escape from the militia that was pursuing his party. He was in the hollow formed by Benge’s Branch coming north off of High Knob. He sent three braves on ahead to make camp and to kill supper. Their passage carried them through Benge’s Gap between Benge’s Branch and Hoot Owl Hollow (Carding Machine Branch), and through Little Stone Gap and up past Rim Rock to the top of Stone Mountain. There they hit present Ben’s Branch (a misspelling by the USGS), and from there to the flood plain at the mouths of Looney and Pigeon Creeks in present Appalachia. The trail they were on would have taken them to Jay Bird, where the trail climbs to the top of Brushy Ridge, which it follows to Olinger Gap and John’s Bottom (Lake Keokee) and on through a second Benge’s Gap (now Morris’s Gap) to Clover Fork, Ky. The militia from Yoakum’s Station located on the Powell River in Lee County at the mouth of Station Creek north of Dryden was marching to head off Benge, and in the evening of April 8, 1794 they came through the gap in Stone Mountain and into the flood plain of southern Appalachia. There they saw the wisp of smoke made by one of Benge’s scouts as he made a camp fire. They shot him, and soon killed the two other who were off hunting supper.

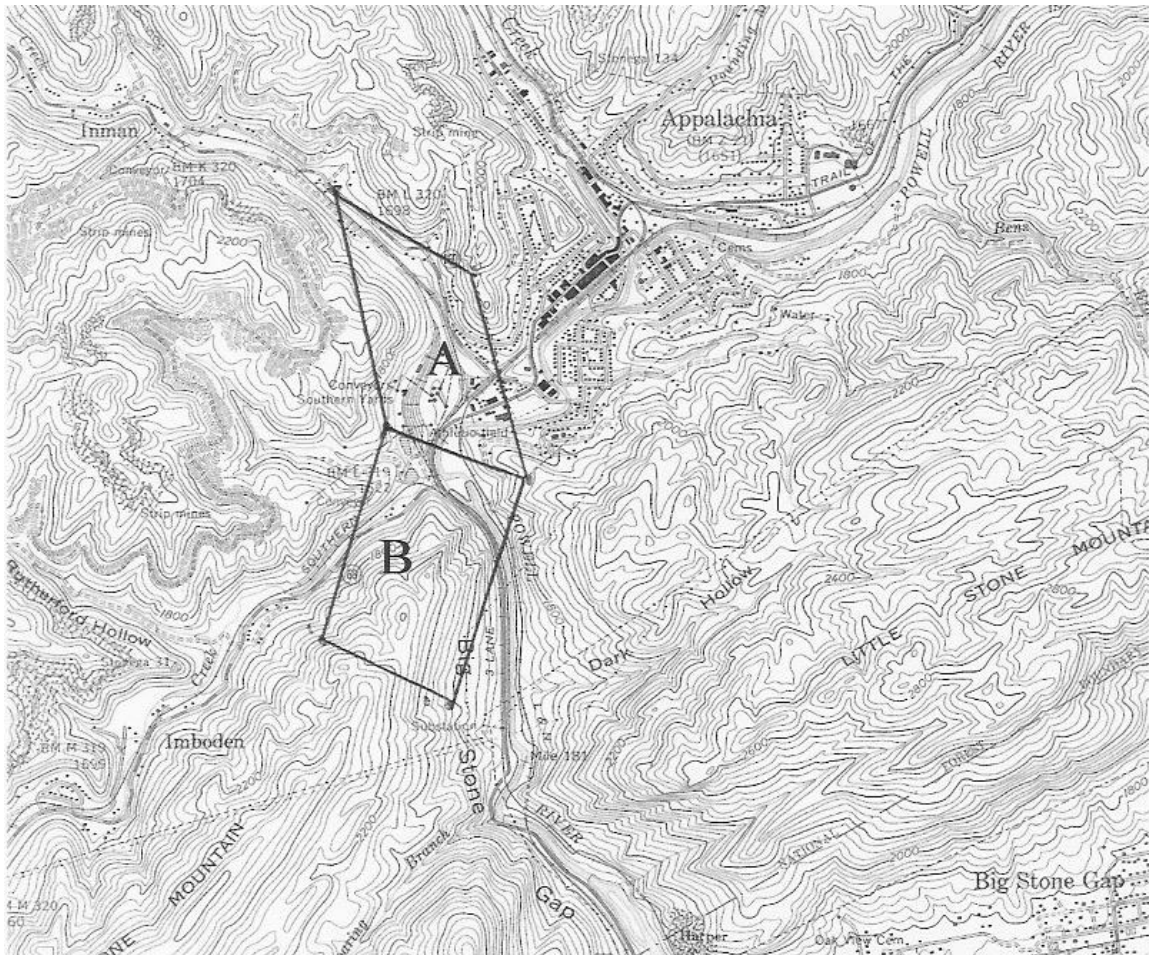
During the Civil War, in a letter written by Captain George D. French CSA to his commanding officer Major General John Cabell Breckenridge dated January 6, 1865, French, who was commanding the 7th Confederate Cavalry, was camped on Stony Creek in Scott County, about twelve miles from ‘Stone Gap’. This could only have referenced the Stone Gap on Powell River, and not the Stone Gap on Stony Creek. French stated that one of his scouts had just returned, and reported that he had found a party of Union Home Guards encamped on Looney Creek in Wise County. French observed that these Federal soldiers had robbed citizens of everything they could conveniently carry away. Capt. Jones, commanding the scouting party, engaged the enemy near the Stone Gap of Stone Mountain, killing 8 and driving the enemy away. The authors of the letter believed that most likely these Federalists were from the Harlan County Poor Fork Home Guard. This would have meant that they were from the vicinity of present Cumberland, Kentucky.



Graphic 2 – This is the famous ‘Olinger Survey’, derived from a land grant to Fields, Nathaniel Taylor, and Johnson (LO 35-291) which was issued in 1796, just two years after Benge’s last raid. This grant wound up being owned by the Virginia Coal and Iron Company, and which includes all of the Town of Appalachia.⁽³⁾

Graphic 3 – In 1805 Zachariah N. Wells, Sr. moved to the mouth of Looney Creek, and by doing so became the first settler of record of what is now Appalachia (LO 60-259), Virginia. Virginia had already granted this land to Fields, Taylor, and Johnson. In 1818 John J. Kelly bought land touching the Wells land to its north (Lee DB 3 – Pg. 394). His son, Mathias, was related to the Sturgills and the Wells, all of whom had come from the Yadkin Valley of North Carolina via Mouth-of-Wilson. Mathias’s son was John Jackson Kelly 1st, who opened the first post office in what was to become the Town of Appalachia. It was named ‘Gilley’, and was situated at the southeastern

mouth of the Double Tunnel. This post office's name was changed to 'Inman' in 1899, and may have been associated with a move to that coal camp, which is now incorporated as part of the Town of Appalachia. John Sturgill married a daughter of Zachariah N. Wells, Sr. His uncle James had acquired 100 acres at the mouth of Callahan Creek in Appalachia, which John bought in 1816. He had a hunting camp located on the last bottom land on Mudlick Creek above present Roda. In 1826 the Callahan tract was bought by Martin Kilbourne⁽⁴⁾. Kilbourne Ave. in the Old Bottom section of town was named after them.



**B LO 60-259
ZACHARIAH N.
WELLS, SR.**

**A LEE DB 3-PG 394
J. J. KELLY**

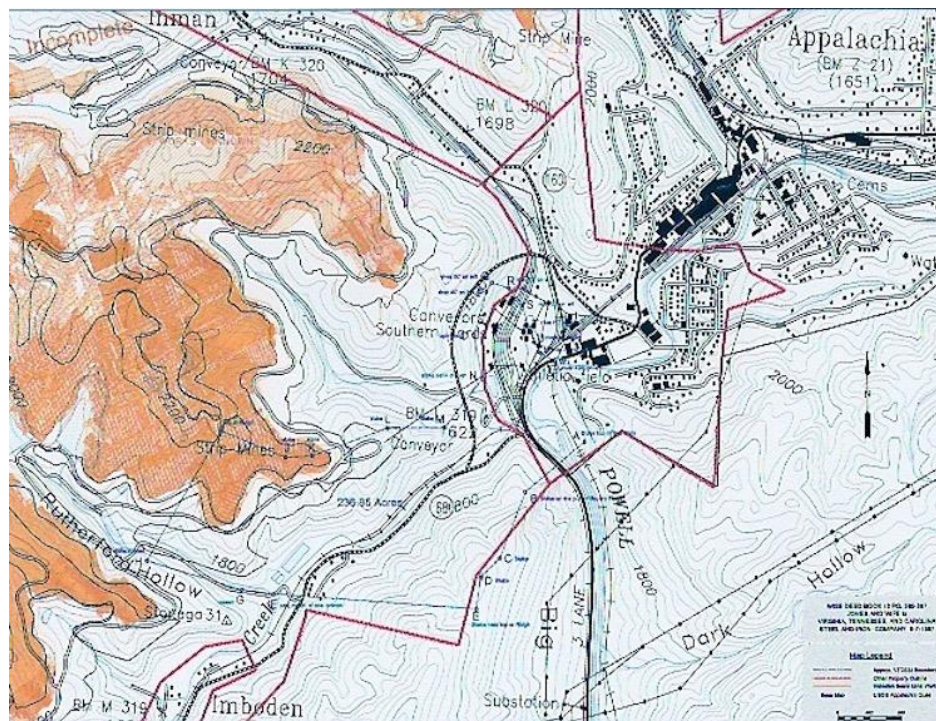
Placement of 8-18-16

The Wise DB 5-300 shows that Mathias Kelly was operating a sawmill near the mouth of Pigeon Creek prior to 1890. This was before the coming of the

railroad. He negotiated an agreement with the South Atlantic and Ohio Railroad in which he granted them a right-of-way for their railroad in exchange for a siding to his mill.⁽⁵⁾

Kelly had bought out Wells on Looney Creek and Pigeon Creek. William D. Jones and wife from Pennsylvania had bought the Kellys' land near the oxbow. Jones and siblings, either through inheritance or early purchase, had owned all of present Middlesboro, Kentucky. They sold it to an English syndicate for \$300,000.00, and Jones moved to Philadelphia. He became involved with the Imboden brothers (Gen. John Daniel and Francis Marion) and their corporate entities, such as the SA&O RR and the Virginia, Tennessee, & Carolina Steel and Iron Company. He became a front man for those related companies, and using his insider information about their proposed routes, he bought up land and resold it to the companies he had stock in. For example, he bought Natural Tunnel in Scott Co., and sold it to VT&CS&I for \$4,000. Similarly, he bought up the J. J. Kelly property in the Town of Big Stone Gap along the southwestern lip of the gap in Stone Mountain, where Kelly had moved after he had left Appalachia. Jones bought the land that was to be the route of the L&N RR out of the Town of Appalachia to its northeast from W. K. Kilbourne and Jerome Duff (owner of the Duff Academy of Big Stone Gap (now the June Toliver House) under the name of Virginia-Kentucky Land Association, and the land laying between Looney Ridge and Callahan Creek as far north as the end of the original town limits.⁽⁶⁾ (3)

Graphic 4 – This is a plotting of the Kelly to W. D. Jones deed at Looney Creek – note the curious lunar curve to its western boundary (by Meador Engineering Co.)



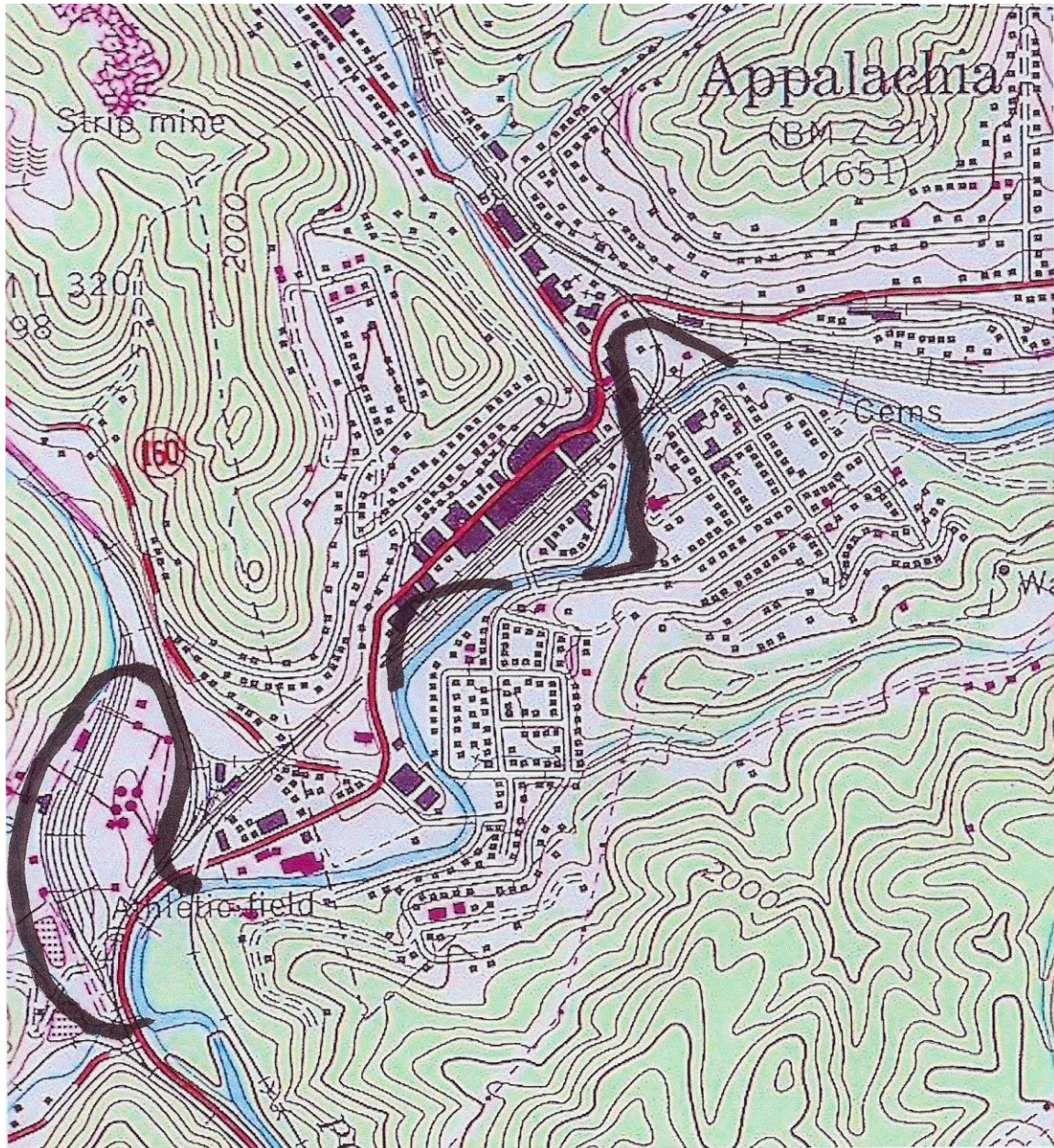
Graphic 5 – Note that “Appalachia” is called “Callihan”. Note that the L&N goes on toward Norton, and the single spur up Looney Creek. Note that the river runs to the north of the RR tracks, and not to the south. (1891 USGS Map)



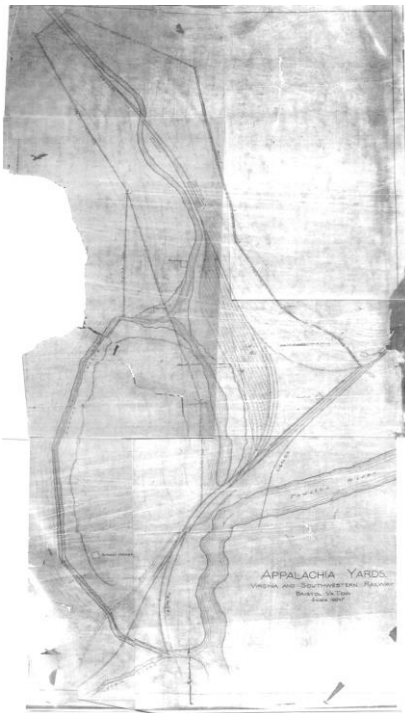
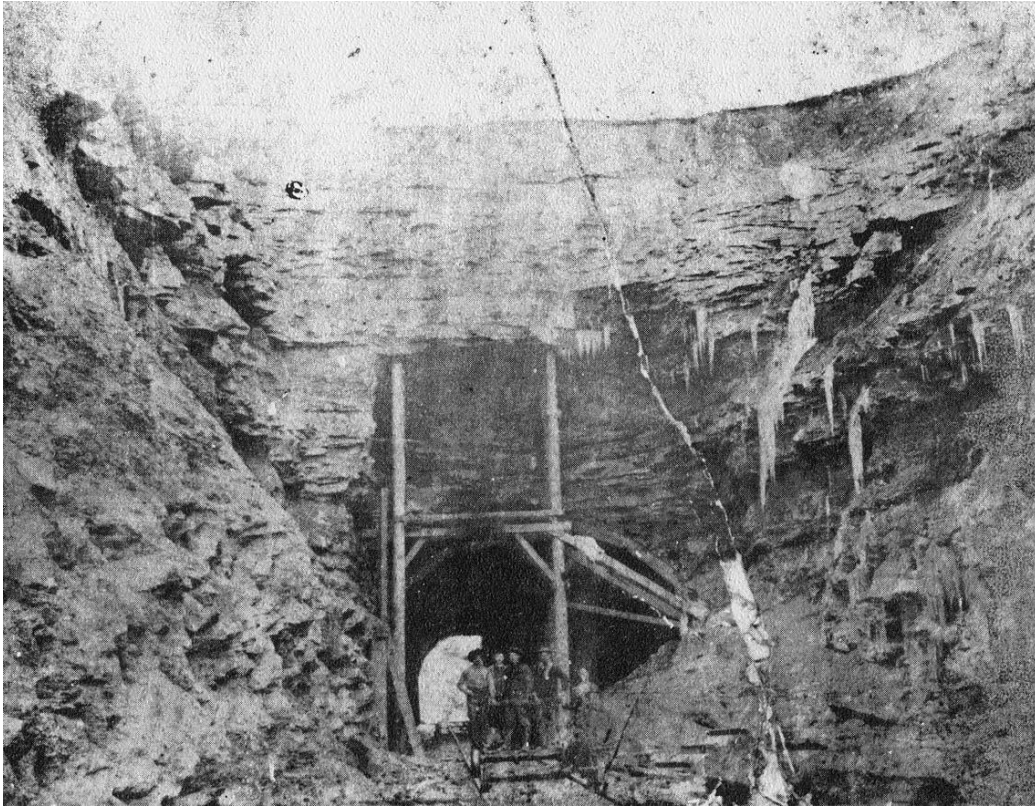


Graphic 6 – 1890 map of Appalachia, which may require magnification. However, if you could see it you would note the “William D. Jones Estate’s Virginia – Kentucky Land Assn.” housing development along the northern side of the Norton Road, making it the oldest housing development in town. The course of the river through town as shown on this map is hand drawn on the next graphic.

Graphic 7 – The river channels shown on graphic #6 are drawn onto a 1950’s era topographic map.

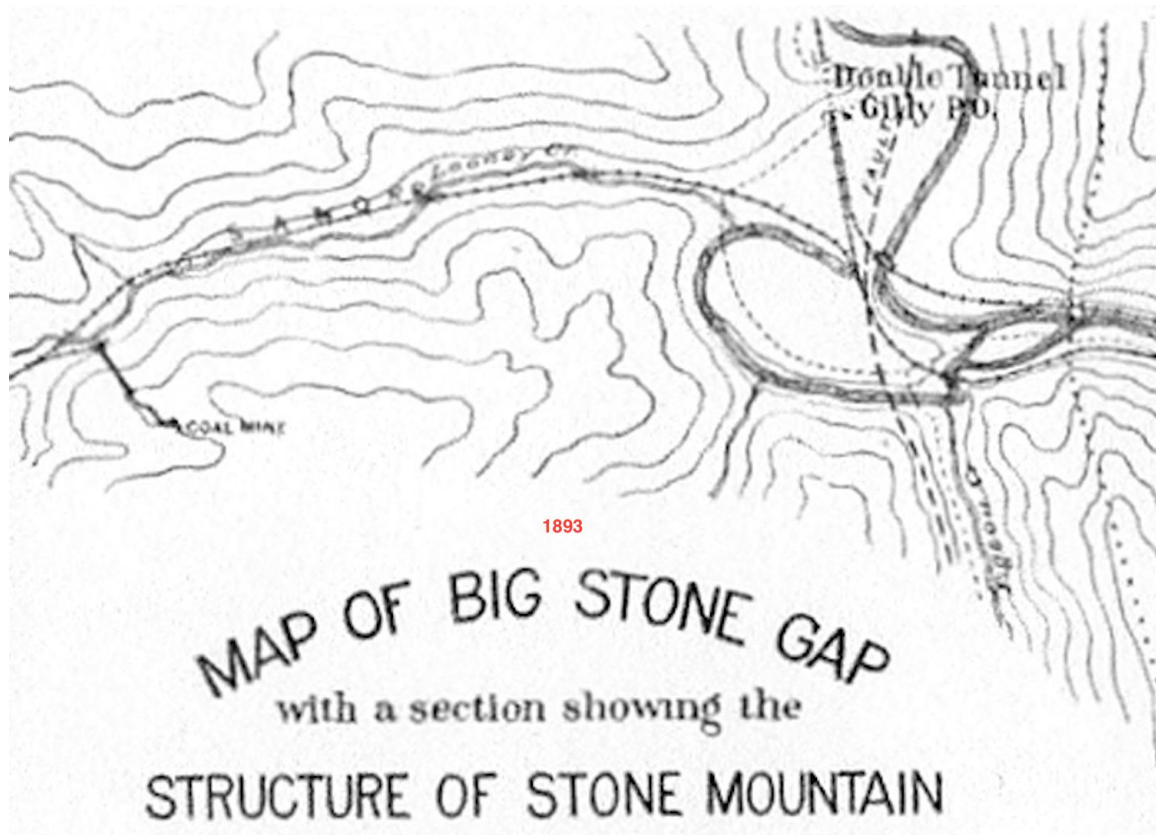


Graphic 8 – photo of the “double tunnel”, or what became “the cut” – This was the dominant feature in the town for years. Note that that graphic #5 shows that the L&N had penetrated through the tunnel by 1890.



Graphic 9 – map from Wise County Deed book 32 shows the V&SW and the cut off ox bow at Intermont Yards – undated, but note that the tracks through the cut were double, and since the V&SW bought the RR in 1910, the map is after that date.

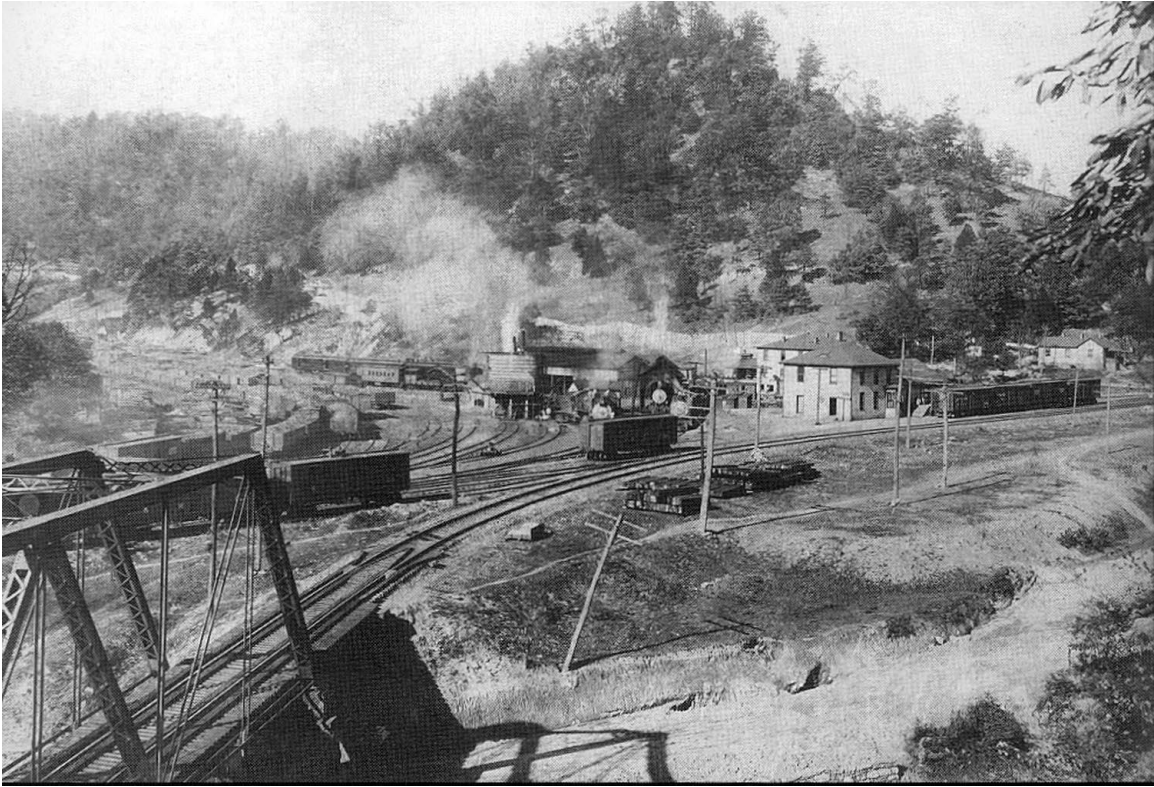
Graphic 10 – 1893 map of Intermont and the Looney Creek mine published in 1893 by the United States Geologic Survey. Note the cut off oxbow, and the first commercial coal mine in the western part of Wise Co.



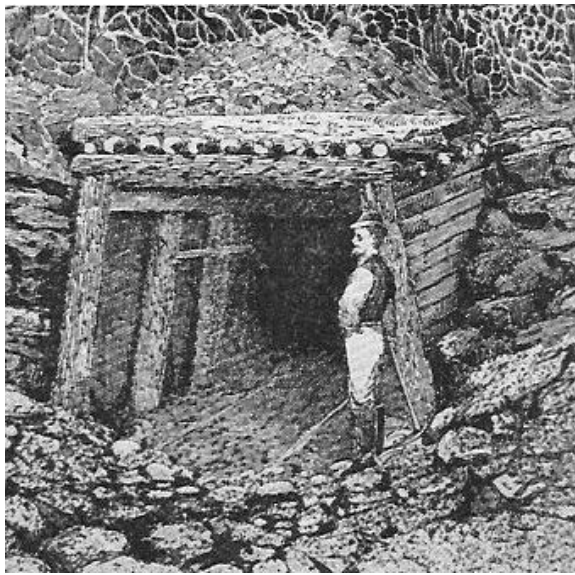
Graphic 11 – oldest photo of a home in Appalachia. This is the home of J. J. Kelly II that was located at Kelly View on the site of the recent grade school. He is the son of the J. J. Kelly I who had lived at the mouth of Looney and Pigeon Creek. J. J. Kelly II had lived for a while on what is now marked on the map as Kelly Branch at Cross Brook, but is more commonly known as Hensley Hollow. He was the father of J. J. Kelly III, who went to school at Kelly View, and who was Superintendent of Wise County Schools during the 1940s & 50's.



Graphic 12 – V&SW RR Yards in Appalachia – note the cut off oxbow or “the swamp”, and the boarding house – date about 1910 or 1911.



Graphic 13 – woodcut of the first coal mine is western Wise County, or “the Looney Creek Mine” of 1892^(6& 7).



Bibliography:

1 – Diego Gutierrez – as published in the “National Geographic” in the spring of 2018, and also in the Library of Congress and Google Images

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2 – Panfilo de Narvaez and the Apalachee Indians

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4 – Ibid pgs. 54-55

5 – Fleenor, Lawrence J. – “The Early Timber Industry within the Gap in Stone Mountain Along the Powell River Hiking Trail” – BigStoneGapPublishing.net

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7 – Addington, Luther – History of Wise County